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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: priority theme: women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development

Ministerial round table: enhancing national institutional arrangements for gender equality and women's empowerment

Chair's summary

1. At its 3rd meeting, on 14 March 2016, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the topic "Enhancing national institutional arrangements for gender equality and women's empowerment", under the priority theme "Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development". The participants in the round table exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the topic, with an emphasis on the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2. The State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Yoji Muto, chaired the round table, and the Special Envoy on Gender of the African Development Bank, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, served as moderator. The meeting opened with brief introductions by the Chair and the moderator. Ministers and high-level officials from 28 Member States participated in the round table.

National institutional arrangements for gender equality and the empowerment of women

3. Participants provided examples from their countries of national institutional arrangements across branches and sectors of government for decision-making, policy action and budgeting on gender equality and women's empowerment. They described a wide range of frameworks and mechanisms and highlighted the diversity

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of arrangements available for this purpose. Constitutional guarantees of gender equality or non-discrimination were referenced frequently, as were national gender equality mechanisms, including ministries responsible for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. Many participants described legislation, action plans, policies and programmes on a wide range of issues relating to gender equality, including initiatives promoting economic opportunities for women and addressing women's unpaid labour, the prevention of violence against women, the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, and the protection of the rights of vulnerable women. A number of participants described temporary special measures to increase women's representation in decision-making positions, including through mandatory quotas for women in parliament and local governance structures and on corporate boards. It was noted, however, that while increasing the number of women in decision-making roles was important, it was imperative that both women and men who were committed advocates for gender equality and women's empowerment be in leadership positions.

4. Institutional arrangements, such as parliamentary and ministerial committees on gender equality, were described as being useful tools for bringing together decision makers across different sectors of government and political parties. Several participants underscored the importance of partnerships between government and non-governmental actors, including through advisory groups comprising experts drawn from civil society, international organizations and the private sector, which can provide Governments with access to a broad range of technical expertise.

Expanding the capacity, decision-making power and visibility of national gender equality mechanisms

5. While participants shared a commitment to ensuring that gender equality and women's empowerment were priorities for all branches and sectors of government, several participants stressed the importance of having a single entity responsible for the coordination of efforts and for monitoring progress at the national level. In this regard, national gender equality mechanisms provided a unifying framework for accelerating progress towards gender equality and helped to prevent the fragmentation of efforts.

6. Participants discussed the importance of expanding the capacity, decision-making power and visibility of gender equality mechanisms, with a particular focus on the financing of such mechanisms, as well as data collection, monitoring and assessment. They emphasized the importance of adequate funding for their work within ministries and other gender equality mechanisms, and for gender equality generally. There was agreement that Governments needed to allocate more resources for achieving gender equality in accordance with the priority accorded to it at the highest levels of political leadership and in line with existing commitments, in order to achieve results. Participants described a range of efforts with regard to financing, including gender-responsive budgeting and allocating funds for projects aimed at women's empowerment.

7. Ministers discussed the significance of reliable and comprehensive data disaggregated by sex and other factors and of gender statistics for their work. The relationship between data and gender-responsive budgeting was noted; a lack of gender-specific information on revenue and expenditure in the development of budgets may have negative impacts on gender equality that go unnoticed. Several

participants emphasized the importance of accountability in achieving tangible progress, and of data disaggregated by sex in measuring such progress. The role of non-governmental organizations in monitoring progress and assessing results was emphasized.

Gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

8. Many participants noted the particular significance of their work in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Ministers were in agreement that their efforts should go beyond achieving the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They emphasized that all of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and their targets should contribute to the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment. To that end, participants stressed the importance of multisectoral partnerships for gender equality and the full involvement of gender equality mechanisms in all aspects of policymaking and programming for gender-responsive sustainable development. The role of the international human rights frameworks in those efforts, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, was stressed.

9. Participants emphasized the important role of Heads of Government and political leaders as advocates for the centrality of gender equality in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They stressed that this commitment must extend from the highest levels of government to the regional and local levels. In this regard, several participants discussed the importance of women's participation, including women's civil society organizations, in the drafting of plans to implement the 2030 Agenda.